Private philanthropic foundations in the U.S. have long played central roles in advancing social change and shaping policy priorities, while simultaneously being relatively unconstrained by democratic accountability mechanisms. While this autonomy allows foundations to innovate, experiment and take risks that may lead to effective policy outcomes, it has also historically led to normative concerns about the power of private wealth within the public realm.

The core framework of the course will engage with these questions by utilizing an experiential approach, wherein students will participate in a hands-on process of making actual grants to nonprofit organizations. The Once Upon A Time Foundation has provided a grant of $50,000 that the class will allocate as a course-long project, directly applying the concepts discussed during class through a practical lens. Students will determine the mission and objective of the funding based on students’ values; the organization(s) to which funding will be allocated; the number of and size of the gift(s) that will be made; how the gift(s) will be awarded; and how the impact of the gift(s) will be evaluated and assessed.

Grading

Students will be evaluated based on their performance in four areas of the course.
- Written process journals: 15%
- In-class participation (discussion contributions and preparation): 30%
- Grantmaking group project: 45%
  - First-round presentation in teams of four people: 10%
  - Written due diligence report for final presentations: 20%
  - Final group presentation: 15%
- Final reflection: 10%

Assignments

**Written process journals.** Students will keep journals of their reactions to the grantmaking process, and will submit them at two intervals during the semester, at approximately halfway through the semester and at the conclusion of the grantmaking process. These journals are intended to be predominantly a formative
tool, enabling students to process their reactions, emotions, and reflections during the course of the semester in a concrete manner, and recording these written observations in order to serve the composition of final summative reflections. While the journals will not be graded, students are expected to regularly write about their reactions to the process, questions they may have, and ideas to share with classmates.

**Class participation.** The course is highly interactive and discussion-based, and as such, participation is a significant and crucial component of students’ experiences. Contributions in class should reveal a substantial familiarity with the assigned readings, a capacity to analyze the issues and problems under discussions, and an ability to incorporate, synthesize, and constructively criticize the comments of classmates. Students are expected to read all the readings assigned for every class session and actively engage in all in-class exercises, which will include small-group work as well as larger-group discussions and debates.

**Grantmaking group project.** The group project component of the class grantmaking process will include three components. On the first day of class, students will form teams of four to five people based on common interest or issue areas. These groups will meet outside of class to determine four nonprofit organizations to present as candidates for possible funding allocation.

Teams will present their four choices in a first round of presentations on March 11. Teams will formally present the following components to the class: A) the process by which they arrived at their decisions and B) a case for the organizations they chose. These presentations, which should be approximately 15 to 20 minutes in length. Following the results of these presentations, the teams will conduct formal due diligence on a subset of organizations to consider in a final round of discussion.

Teams will make final presentations on April 15, detailing their final recommendations regarding funding candidates. Prior to the final presentations, teams will submit formal written reports summarizing their organizational research on the nonprofits that are being considered, and all students will read them in their entirety.

**Final reflection.** Students will compose 10 page papers that reflect on their learning in the class, how the process of engaging in grantmaking contributed to their development, and their ideas regarding charitable and philanthropic engagement going forward after the class.

*Note about assignments: Unless otherwise stated in class, written assignments are to be completed in Times New Roman 12 point font, double-spaced, and submitted to Drop Box on CTools.*

**Course policies**

- Students are expected to complete an anonymous pre-class and post-class survey to be shared with the course sponsor, the Once Upon A Time Foundation.
- Students are expected to attend class regularly and on time, and to notify the instructor of all planned absences and late arrivals in advance, barring emergencies. Students who have more than one unexcused absence will relinquish their spaces in the class. Instances of lateness to class of more than 15 minutes, barring emergencies, will be counted as unexcused absences. Students must be present on the first day of class in order to remain enrolled, except by prior arrangement with the instructor.
- Paper extensions require prior arrangements with the instructor. There will be no exceptions to this policy, barring emergencies. Late papers will receive a deduction of one course grade per day, and papers that are more than two days late will not be accepted.
• Laptops are not permitted in class, except when accommodations are necessary for students’ learning. Accommodations should be arranged with the instructor in advance of the course with appropriate documentation.
• Students are expected to conduct themselves with academic honesty and integrity as established at http://www.rackham.umich.edu/policies/academic_and_professional_integrity/.
• The instructor reserves the right to make reasonable changes to the syllabus throughout the course of the semester, with appropriate notice to students, in the event of timely news developments that may align with relevant topics under discussion. As such, students should rely on the copy of the syllabus that will be posted and updated regularly on CTools.

Class schedule

All readings will either be posted on the course CTools website or are available online as indicated in the syllabus.

Week 1. Wednesday, January 7. Introductions; overview of course; discussion of class values and priorities
Readings:

Due: Pre-class survey

Week 2. Wednesday, January 14. Charity and philanthropy
Readings:

Week 3. Wednesday, January 21. Locus of control in philanthropy: Case study of Give Directly
Readings:
• This American Life 503, “I was just trying to help,” August 16, 2013. Listen to the radio programme at http://www.thisamericanlife.org/radio-archives/episode/503/i-was-just-trying-to-help
• Peruse http://www.givewell.org/international/top-charities/give-directly
Week 4. Wednesday, January 28. Philanthropy and issues of democracy; process discussion

Readings:


Due: Written process journals

Week 5. Wednesday, February 4. No class

Week 6. Wednesday, February 11. Strategic philanthropy

Readings:

- Materials for organizational assessment/due diligence work

Week 7. Wednesday, February 18. Foundations and public partnerships: Case study of the Detroit bankruptcy and the Detroit Art Institute

Readings:


Week 8. Wednesday, February 25. The supply side: The “warm glow” of philanthropy

Readings:

Due: Written process journals

Week 9. Wednesday, March 4. Spring break, no class

Week 10. Wednesday, March 11. Philanthropy workshop: First round of presentations; process discussion

Due: First-round group presentations

Week 11. Wednesday, March 18. Grantwriting and theories of change

Readings:

- “If the Founding Fathers wrote a grant proposal.” Available at http://www.blueavocado.org/node/804
- Grantwriting documents:
  - “Approaching the Foundation”
  - “Knowledge base – Letter of Inquiry”
  - “Letter of Inquiry strategy”
  - “Writing a successful grant proposal”
  - Sample Request for Proposals
  - Successful grant proposal to Surdna Foundation

Week 12. Wednesday, March 25. Measuring impact; case study of the Robin Hood Foundation

Readings:

- Pallotta, D. 2013. “The way we think about charity is dead wrong.” TED (watch the talk online at http://www.ted.com/talks/dan_pallotta_the_way_we_think_about_charity_is_dead_wrong?language=en)

Week 13. Wednesday, April 1. Accountability, collaboration and community responsiveness: Case study of the Meyer Foundation and Southern Partners Fund

Readings:


**Week 14. Wednesday, April 8. Philanthropy and inequality**

*Readings:*

- Moskowitz, D. 2013. “Peter Buffett and the media-‘Karpman Drama Triangle’ complex.” Available at [https://medium.com/i-m-h-o/625c1bf280c8](https://medium.com/i-m-h-o/625c1bf280c8), July 29.

**Due: Due diligence reports**

**Week 15. Wednesday, April 15. Philanthropy workshop: Final presentations**

**Week 16. Wednesday, April 22. Concluding comments, presentation to grantee organizations and class celebration (brunch at instructor’s home)**

**Due: Written process journals, final reflection memos, and post-class survey**